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Publication date:
2017

Document Version
Peer reviewed version

[Link back to DTU Orbit](#)

Citation (APA):
Moiseyenko, R., Baum, A., Jørgensen, T. M., Glanville, S., Laursen, C. N., Mansouri, S. S., & Gernaey, K. V. (2017). *Imaging for monitoring downstream processing of fermentation broths*. Abstract from Recent Advances in Fermentation Technology (RAFT 2017), Florida, United States.

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Imaging for monitoring downstream processing of fermentation broths

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In relation to downstream processing of a fermentation broth coagulation/flocculation is a typical pretreatment method for separating undesirable particles/impurities from the wanted product. In the coagulation process the negatively charged impurities are destabilized by adding of a clarifying agent thereby neutralizing the charges on the particles. Particles thus agglomerate. Larger agglomerates are formed in the flocculation process by adding a polymer, which forms bridges between the particles. The operation of coagulators, flocculators and clarifiers requires trained operators implying the human factor to play a major risk with regard to performance. Better process monitoring will provide the means for improved control giving higher yield, better quality, and minimize the consumption of water. In particular, the optimal separation of biomass from a soluble enzyme phase is often dependent on an initial coagulation of the biomass and a final flocculation of the solids just prior to separation. We investigate flocculation processes at Novozymes facilities so that the response time and risk of error is minimized. We use oCelloScope [1], an automated microscope, for imaging samples from the flocculation process and subsequently we extract image features for qualitative and quantitative image characterization. The processing include image morphology, image segmentation and image quantification. The aim is to correlate image information to "quality" of the separation process. Here we report our initial finding. [1] M.Fredborg et al. Journal of Clinical Microbiology Vol 51 Number 7 p. 2047–2053 (2013); <http://www.biosensesolutions.dk>